

Twitter stops enforcing Covid-19 misinformation policy

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By REBECCA KERN, 11/29/2022 10:33 AM EST

Twitter will no longer stop users from spreading false information about the Covid-19 virus or vaccines, according to an update on its content moderation policies.

It's another major shift under new owner Elon Musk, who has pressed for "free speech" above all else on the platform. Twitter's Covid-19 misinformation page [was updated with a note saying that as of Nov. 23](#), the platform would no longer enforce its policies against spreading misleading information on the virus and vaccines — which had led to more than 11,000 account suspensions since 2020.

Since his takeover, Musk has fired huge swaths of the company, including thousands of contract and full-time employees who were responsible for content moderation.

At the same time, several top executives overseeing content moderation policies and enforcement, including Twitter's former head of Trust and Safety, Yoel Roth, have left the company.

Tom Tarantino, who formerly led Twitter's Covid-19 Response Task Force, said the lack of staff also likely contributed to the policy reversal.

"Misinformation policies are very labor intensive to enforce as it typically requires human review to read context," he said. "As many — or all — of the team that is enforcing that policy is no longer there, I imagine that this is more about practicality than philosophy."

On Capitol Hill, Democrats blasted the decision. "The misinformation is beyond dangerous, it's potentially deadly to a lot of people who may be unable to see through a lot of the misinformation that's out there," Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) told reporters Tuesday.

And medical professionals likewise said the move could harm people. "Nowhere near enough was being done to stamp out medical misinformation on social media previously; but this step, along with re-platforming voices who wish to sow confusion and increase mistrust in medicine, will do more harm," said Jack Resneck Jr., the president of the American Medical Association, in a statement. He also urged patients to seek out accurate medical information, including from their own physician.

While Twitter never formally announced the change, Twitter users noticed the policy update on Monday night, and it was [first reported by CNN](#). It appears to be part of Musk's plans to grant "general amnesty" to previously banned accounts — like that of former President Donald Trump — and the tech billionaire has said he's [updating policies this week](#) that would reinstate more accounts.

This could mean the 11,230 accounts suspended since Twitter's Covid-19 misinformation policy went into effect [in early 2020](#) may soon be or are in the process of being reinstated. One of the biggest repeat offenders was Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.), whose personal account was reinstated last week after being suspended for repeatedly breaking Twitter's policy against spreading false Covid-19 information.

Jenna Sherman, a program manager at health information research nonprofit Meedan, said she worries other social media platforms follow suit and reduce their Covid-19 misinformation enforcement as well.

“The other platforms are going to be keeping a close eye on Twitter and seeing essentially if they can get away with it, because if they can, they can save themselves a lot of money and resources and time by following a similar model and still look good in a rolled back version,” Sherman said.

She said for users on Twitter, “I think that the susceptibility to fall prey to misinformation will be higher because people’s guards will be down because people haven’t been doing that work for themselves.”

If Covid-19 misinformation spreads far enough, Meedan said it could potentially spur Congress to roll back tech platforms’ Section 230 liability shield to hold them liable for Covid-19 misinformation on their site.